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THE NEW WESTERNER.

BY CHARLES MOREAU HARGER.

I.

THE story of the material development of the West has been an instructive serial with constantly increasing interest in its chapters. Not all the incidents making up the marvellous narrative have been pleasant ones—anti-climaxes have mingled with inspiring situations; but each has had its part in bringing out of vast sodded plains and wealth-lined hills an empire of rich farms, prosperous towns and thriving cities. Through it all has run the tale of frontier struggle against nature, conquest of the desert, adaptation of methods to new conditions and comparative triumph over climatic surprises and engineering difficulties.

In acres, bushels and dollars has been expressed with exuberant liberality the measure of the West's success, generally disregarding the moulding influence of thirty years or more of trial upon the people themselves.

A third of a century, broadly speaking, has gone into making the Westerner of to-day, and it has evolved a type differing much from that of the beginning, and often corresponding little in its chief characteristics with the popular conception distant communities have formed of it.

The settlers of early days were dreamers. Whether they sought the West to found homes on newly broken sod, or were to join the army of traders and storekeepers brought into service by the increasing population, they had one hope in common: to make a fortune in a short time, then return to the old home "back East" and live in comfort ever after. They were animated by the same spirit as were the Argonauts who toiled toward the gold-fields of '49. Veterans of the Civil War, disappointed in

business when the conflict ended, looked upon the virgin lands as offering opportunity for conquest, but it took hard fighting to bring victory out of the bare soil. The speculators and country merchants met with reverses as often as did the farmer. Both classes remained in the West: each made discoveries, and in the end each attained to success—but the soldier reared his family where he took his claim, and the business man saw years slip away before he enjoyed even a short trip to the old home.

The Texas cattle trail, opened from the Gulf into central Kansas in 1867 to meet the first railway across the plains, formed a north and south highway that led Southerners into the fertile lands. Three million cattle were driven over the trail in 1870-71, and with them journeyed representatives of a vast Southwest industry. As the railway pushed on to the mountains and branch lines reached down into the Staked Plains, the movement of cattle on the hoof ceased, but that of men did not, and Cavalier mingled with Puritan in the development of the great granary of the nation.

The sturdy immigration from Europe, Scandinavians from the north and Germans from farther south, with tens of thousands of English, Irish and Canadians in every commonwealth made up the cosmopolitan population which was to unite in the task of conquering the desert. The lesson has been learned through tribulation, and its mastery has fused the varying elements into the modern type which is practically a new generation.

The dwellers in the somewhat indefinite area which we term the "Middle West," extending from the Mississippi to the Rocky Mountains and excluding the States bordering on the Gulf, are essentially a farming people. Of 3,352,000 engaged in gainful pursuits, according to the recent census, 1,713,000 are devoting their attention to agriculture. The hardship inseparable from opening new crop areas attended their early trials. Remote from neighbors, lacking in implements, harassed by debts when crops failed, and with insufficient knowledge of climatic conditions, they spent the first years of pioneer life in a somewhat serious pursuit of happiness.

As the big ranches have been broken up and the size of farms decreased, the solitude of the homestead has vanished, and there have entered into the life of the prairie-dweller many elements of contentment, driving out the old-time longing for the child-

hood home, even if it be not forgotten. The older generation, the one that has put in long years of middle life on the plains, never will forget.

"I see by the paper," remarked a grandfather two hundred miles west of the Missouri River, as he read a village journal published in a little western New York town, "I see that they are having lots of snow down home." Down home! It has not been his home for a quarter of a century, yet the old associations held fast, and unconsciously he deemed himself a sojourner in a strange land. Tens of thousands of those village papers fluttering each week in the prairie dwellings keep alive the sentiment of youth for the native abiding-place, the East.

The new generation, as well as the one that came West in childhood, now grown to manhood's and womanhood's estate, knows nothing of this. To such the West is home. Western ways and Western ideas are inbred—the wind-swept farm, with its struggling cottonwood grove, is as dear as ever was to the parents some New England cottage, with giant elms and rustling beeches overshadowing its moss-grown roof.

Perhaps the most lasting influence in the making of a Westerner was the poverty of early days. For there was poverty, with its accompanying trials, in most families. It did not always show on the surface, but, hidden beneath the couponed mortgage note and revealed, when crops were scant, by the overdue store accounts, it existed in positive form. Talk with most old settlers and they will tell you frankly of this.

"We would have been on our feet," commented a now prosperous stockman, "if the wind hadn't turned to the north one June day in '79. We had two hundred acres of wheat on the bottoms, and it was ripe for harvest. Grain was worth almost a dollar a bushel, and it was good for thirty bushels to the acre. On the afternoon before we were to start the harvesters, a hail-storm came out of the northwest and went down the valley. In two hours the wheat, instead of standing as high as my head, was levelled to six inches. We did not gather a bushel. Of course, the mortgage was foreclosed and we began over again."

Then there were dry years, before the farmers learned that some crops will do nearly as well in drouth as in moisture. It was no modest test of courage to see the corn wither and the grass burn beneath the hot winds of July, knowing that upon

the result of the summer's growth depended the retention of title in the land. Little wonder that discouraged men and disheartened women, mistaking the cause of their disaster, rebelled against political affairs and howled for the destruction of the "Money Power"! It was merely the savage protest of the primitive nature which sought from the object nearest at hand redress for suffering.

Out of those years came the class of "movers," dwellers in "prairie-schooners," who roamed aimlessly here and there as opportunity seemed to offer improvement, and finally, as a pistol-shot gave the signal, made one tremendous rush across the border of Oklahoma and halted on Indian reservations to essay again the settler's task of home-building.

The turn of the tide, the beginning of the change that was to influence so greatly the nervous, quick-tempered and sensitive Westerner, came in 1897. Six years of indifferent crops—not failures, but such uncertainty as made it difficult to meet the large obligations incurred in the boom days earlier—had succeeded 1890, the year of awakening from the West's dream of sudden empire. In that time a quarter of a million people moved out of western Nebraska and Kansas. The population of most prairie States decreased, and into prominence came the class of political leaders whose advice was to raise less corn and more of the unmentionable region. Yet through it all ran an enforced economy, a rigid balancing of resources and outlay, a planning for the future and a determined effort to get rid of the incubus of debt afflicting the West.

This process so manifestly strengthened the finances of the dwellers on level lands that they were attaining to a semblance of independence, even had there come no marked change in crop production. They had overcome the boom spirit, had moved the surplus houses from the town "additions" to the country, had learned some lessons in the rotation of crops and were raising alfalfa, kaffir corn and sorghum to assure themselves of "roughness" should a winter come with a short supply of maize. But radical politics yet held sway; there was a disposition to harass the railroads with stringent regulations; the Westerner was still at odds with investment interests and was half convinced that he was being abused by Wall Street.

In the mining regions and on the great ranches the conditions

had become encouraging. The Cripple Creek gold-fields had given Colorado an impetus toward prosperity, increased by the advance of irrigation on the foot-hills. Cattle prices were reviving in the ranch country, and the stock industry was just about beginning the boom that was to make—and break—dealers two or three years later.

The West was prepared for a business revival that should not only benefit the bank accounts of its people, but have a lasting effect on the trend of their social and mental life.

II.

The material welfare that has come out of the eight years of abundance is easily outlined. It is expressed in a catalogue of cancelled mortgages, new dwellings, refunded bonds, swollen bank deposits and improved belongings. The prairie farmer, with his free rural delivery route, his rural telephone, his rubber-tired top buggy and attitude of independence, has become a familiar figure in current literature. He is interesting and worthy of study. He is not, perhaps, quite so luxurious and plutocratic an individual as he is often pictured, but he occupies a very comfortable place in the economic world.

The influence that has come from this betterment of the Westerner's condition has been manifested in a modified and broadened outlook on life. In some sections the transformation has been marvellous. For instance, in Oklahoma City, where seventeen years ago not a white man had foothold, a population of 30,000 now possesses every modern appliance for ease and comfort. Electric cars traverse the streets over more than 30 miles of track, and groups of Indians, lazily watching the innovation from merchants' doorways, make vivid contrast between the old and the new civilizations. Interurban trolley lines will be in operation a hundred miles west of the Missouri before the end of the current year. Life's enjoyable features which have been monopolized by the East for a decade are moving across the country, as processes of manufacture are cheapened and the ability of new communities to obtain them is met by lessened expense.

The Western States boast a great deal about their bank deposits. It is true that a single bank of New York City has as much money in its coffers as do all those of Kansas, for in-

stance—but, in the latter case, the savings are not trust funds or speculators' accounts; they are those of tens of thousands of hard-working citizens and represent long days of toil beneath burning sun. The ownership of the farmers' comparatively plethoric bank books have had a liberalizing effect. The fateful things promised during the days of financial darkness have been forgotten. The capitalist, while perhaps not considered a comrade, is looked upon as having rights—an attitude once unknown. There is no more talk of electing judges who will refuse to order mortgages foreclosed. For one thing, there are few mortgages to foreclose; and, for another, the Westerner is in favor of enforcing the law to the utmost, since the local loan fund is a staple source of investments in these latter days.

Likewise, it tends to conservatism. The man who seeks bonds for the promotion of a scheme must make a strong argument or fail. The towns look warily on industries that need a bonus. The demand for independence has spread to the minor factors of development, and has caused a more manly position for every community. No antagonism to the East is mingled with this; the West is not so vain as to think it can live by itself alone; it merely stands sturdily with a smile on its face, confident that it ranks as an equal in the development and growth of a great nation.

The Westerner of to-day is a seeker after education. The schools of the West are of exceptional merit. They are for the most part managed by young men; vigor is seen in every movement. The salaries are small, and often the better educators are tempted by much-endowed institutions to seek other fields, but their places are taken by the product of the plains, usually broadened in its view by a touch of post-graduate work in some Eastern university. In the early days, colleges were as much a part of the boom town's equipment as a carriage-works or a sugar-mill—and about as much fitted for the place. Many of the boom colleges have passed away. Consolidation has lessened the numbers of the remainder, and the schools of the West are becoming proportioned to the actual needs of the people. The students in them are workers. In the State University of Kansas, 47 per cent. of the students are paying their own way, earning the money for their own education. In Nebraska, the proportion is about the same, and, even as far east as Missouri, 30 per cent. are earning

all the money for their schooling, and half are partly paying their own expenses.

Out of such experience come manliness, courage, ability. The first generation of Western students has entered into the life of the plains as men and women, and their influence has of itself given to the communities in which they reside a higher ambition. Public libraries are common; women's clubs are everywhere, even out to the "short-grass country" near the foot-hills of the Rockies; lecture courses and classic plays are appreciated. The new Westerner is a well-informed and thinking person. He reads and studies as much as does his Eastern brother or sister, within the limits of his leisure hours. It has broadened his views and brought a contentment into the one-time dreary existence of the frontier.

This sentiment is reflected in the Western newspapers, good indices of the communities in which they are published. Seldom does one find an "Arizona Kicker" in Western journalism. The early-day editors, who delighted in wars of epithet and abuse with their "esteemed but loathed contemporary," have nearly passed away. The few remaining have been softened by the influence of the times. The new generation, grown up in the West and in sympathy with Western conditions, is "moulding public opinion." The prevalence of sanity and good-will, together with intelligent comment on affairs of the day, is noticeable. The average Western paper in a small village is better than its counterpart in an Eastern town of similar size. This may be explained on the ground that it has a wider field and is less harassed by the proximity of cities. Its influence spreads far and its editor is rarely a "fire-eater."

All these conditions bear fruit in the social life of the West. In early days, there was little social distinction. Every man's history "began with the day before yesterday, and no questions asked." The parties were free-for-all, and the balls open to the public. That condition exists to some extent in the remote forefront of the wave of immigration, but for the most part its day has gone. The clannish spirit is not prominent, but division lines are drawn, and the natural differences of temperament are seen in the function of the times. The towns are naturally most progressive in this, though in the country districts the spread of advanced ideas has been rapid.

Homeseekers' excursions bring thousands of Easterners to the West, but "old home week" and the various national gatherings, offering low railroad rates, take other thousands to the former home "back East," to revisit the scenes of childhood. Such visits do much good. There is a return to the West with new ideas, with better sense of the greatness of the country, with a clearer perspective and a larger liberality. In the days when the West was too poor for these journeys, it harbored exaggerated ideas of the possessions of the East. Now it knows that the East is little to be envied—that there is about as much happiness on the prairies as on the boulevards. It has taken back plans for colonial porches and mission furniture, and has learned some things about town-building.

One of these is the advantage of manufactures. All over the West are springing up small manufacturing plants that have for their object the utilization of raw material, or the supplying of a demand that is confined largely to the plains country. Cotton-mills in the Southwest, harvesting-machinery makers in the wheat belt, brick, tile and cement in the oil and gas region—the West is living up to its opportunities.

Thus, on his intellectual and constructive sides the Westerner has had a period of upbuilding and of development. It would be, indeed, remarkable if it had not brought to him a more perfect understanding of the possibilities that are his. The opening of a new empire in the Orient, with its enhancement of Pacific coast trade, has opened to him an outlet for his overflowing products never before dreamed of; the Gulf traffic has taken one-third of his exports to Europe—little wonder that he feels himself a central figure of the nation, equal in standing to any, or that he looks to future years of greater power.

III.

The first generation of Westerners was stern-faced and anxious, with small capital but sturdy faith. That goodly company has passed away. Another is on the stage—the West, that vast granary with indefinite boundaries and with overflowing hopes, has reached a new period of its development.

The pioneer was the beginner. His stout arm guided the plough across level leagues of greening sod; his earnest heart withstood the privations of early years. He was a hero in his generation,

a conqueror of greater things than the kings of old, a forerunner of the incoming of the plain's riper fruitage. Nothing is better established in the study of mankind than that we are influenced by our environment. The Western people reflect the conditions among which they are placed. Upon the plains have mingled the descendant of the Quaker and the offspring of the European; the emigrant from Atlantic slopes and the wide-hatted native of the Gulf borders. To all have come the same training of vigorous strife, the sharpened wits of frontier rivalry, the sympathy of equally modest beginnings. It would be strange if out of the years of stress there came not a character fitting the freedom, the energy, the enthusiasm of the great West. Perhaps the busy years have robbed them of some of that well-balanced ambition for culture which should go hand in hand with the acquisition of wealth; perhaps the insistent restlessness that seems a part of the very air of the plains has restrained the true home-making art of the American; but the foundation has been laid, and already Western communities are giving more thought to the needs of mind and soul.

Is it not fair to expect that the new Westerner, with less anxiety concerning business success, will be more generous in his social, artistic and educational development, rounding out his life more fully with the fair embellishments of culture, and thus reflecting greater honor on himself and on his rich domain?

Is it not fair to anticipate a new type of American; the outgrowth of the lessons learned, of the experiments tried, of the wisdom sought, of the promise and assurance of to-day? In him shall mingle the frugality of the East and the good old-fashioned courtesy of the South. He will prize his possessions most for what they give in the refinement of character; he will cherish success for what it yields in wider opportunity for good. In the stretching areas of sod he will see, with the poet of the Sierras,

"Room, room to turn round in,
To breathe and be free."

The Westerner has emerged from the experimental period of his history. That there will come again lean years and days of discouragement, none can doubt; the skies will not glow forever with promise. But the manner in which the man of the New West meets reverses will mean much. Schooled in the variations

of the seasons, he will not stake all his fortune on one crop or one product. He will encounter drouth complacently, as becomes one who knows crops that thrive nearly as well in dry weather as in wet; he will greet the furnacelike south winds contentedly, as he looks at whirring windmills lifting moisture from the earth's bosom for herds and gardens; he will try no more to build a metropolis at every cross-roads. He will admit that the prairie is not omnipotent. The watchword of the new time is "Stability." After four decades of trial, he has pinned faith to those things that make for permanence; he conserves the wealth the plains possess, rather than seeks for that which is not there.

The New York banker may have some alarm about finance and may spend anxious hours over the stock fluctuations—but the Western farmer jogs along the country road between towering walls of corn and in sight of golden stacks of wheat, his wagon filled with gleaming cans of cream, unconscious of it all. When he depended on one crop alone, he had fits of depression and proceeded to express himself in weird kinds of politics; now, while the grass grows and the sun shines, his prosperity is assured. He is making haste to seek other channels of development—he can exert his superabundant energies in making the West rich in the adornments of all that art and life can give—as it already is in every-day necessities of existence.

The new Westerner is as proud of the plains as were the pioneers; as valiant in their defence; as eager in their eulogy—but he exaggerates less and qualifies more. The West is being pictured as it is, and in dealing thus in candor and frankness its children are establishing their fortunes on surer foundations.

The Western farmer used to think men with wealth did nothing but live at ease, and he howled for the destruction of the money power. Now he has money of his own, and finds that he has to work as hard to take care of it as he did to earn it. He appreciates the obligations of being a capitalist and is cautious about tinkering with the currency.

They say the wheat belt has moved westward. That is not it. The land has moved eastward. It has come under the influence of moister skies, or, what is the same thing, new methods of agriculture have conquered the desert—and there is no frontier.

The pioneer of the plains is a reminiscence. His white-hooded prairie-schooner is little more than a dream.

“Unused, forlorn and gray it stands,
A faded wreck cast far ashore;
The Mayflower of the prairie lands—
Its journey o’er.”

The boomers and the promoters have had their day. They operated on wind, but there is another circulating medium now. Some have reformed; others have gone—some to their long rest, some to Mexico and some to Canada.

The new Westerner is another type—the clear-headed, stout-hearted, frank-faced man of the plains; the product of years of trial, of experiment, of triumph. He trusts not in luck, but in sense and system and preparation; he builds not for a day, but for decades; he is manifest on the distant reaches of the “short-grass country”; he is the rustler of the prairie village; he walks the pavements of progressive cities; he believes in colleges as well as in corner lots; he asks sanity and high ideals in the plans for the growth of the West.

Tanned by the prairie winds, warmed by the glowing sunshine of the level lands, standing where meet the trade currents of North and South, with command over both, the New Westerner has in his grasp a glorious destiny, and he seems capable of living up to its possibilities.

CHARLES MOREAU HARGER.